

CSTE ANNUAL MEETING

CSTE/NASPHV JOINT POSITION STATEMENT 1997-ID-18

COMMITTEE: Infectious Disease

TITLE: Position Statement on Free-Roaming/Unowned/Feral/Stray Cats

ISSUE: Free-roaming/unowned/feral/stray cats are introduced, established, non-native species which may impact public health by transmission of zoonotic diseases.

POSITION TO BE ADOPTED:

CSTE/NASPHV:

- 1) Recognizes the benefits of the human/animal bond.
- 2) Acknowledges there are potential public health risks associated with free-roaming/unowned/feral/stray cats.
- 3) Supports actions by local health departments, humane societies, and animal control groups in reducing the numbers of stray animals to minimize the impact of free-roaming/unowned/feral/stray cats.
- 4) Is concerned that "managed cat colonies" may foster irresponsible cat ownership and will promote the free-roaming of unowned cats.
- 5) Encourages the timely neutering, regular veterinary care and maintenance of owned cats inside owners' homes.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION:

Zoonotic diseases associated with free-roaming/unowned/feral/stray cats include rabies, bartonellosis, plague, larval migrans, toxoplasmosis, and other infections due to cat bites. To control these diseases and bite injuries, public health recommendations have historically included depopulation of feral cats (and dogs). To avoid euthanasia of these animals, some advocate "managing" free-roaming/unowned/feral/stray cat colonies. Such management practices range from supplemental feeding to more integrated programs including capture/neuter/vaccination/release. However, no evidence exists that these colonies adequately reduce public health concerns. Rabies will continue to be a risk, as such colonies are not closed. Several reports suggest that support of "managed cat colonies" may increase the public's likelihood of abandoning unwanted pets in lieu of more responsible options. Additionally, free-roaming/unowned/feral/stray cats may be responsible for the decline in native species of birds, reptiles and small mammals, and may be associated with increased risk of disease for pets (e.g., transmission of feline immunodeficiency virus and feline leukemia virus).

COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES:

Agency for Response: National Animal Control Association (NACA)

Agencies for Information: American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

US Fish and Wildlife Service

US Animal Health Association

The Humane Society of the US

American Humane Association

National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)

American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

CONTACT:

Lisa Conti, D.V.M., M.P.H.
Florida State Health Office
4052 Bald Cypress Way, BIN A-12
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1720
(850) 245-4408
lisa_conti@doh.state.fl.us